CONTENT WARNINGS

*Child abuse

*Arson

*Gun violence

*Implied cannibalism

*High pitched noises (SFX)

[Theme music: “Some Spooky Sh*t Is Going On Here” by Theo Goodwin]

INTRO

The Underwood Collection is a derivative, non-canonical, fan-made project derived from The Magnus Archives, an original horror podcast which is created and distributed by Rusty Quill Ltd. The Underwood Collection is not endorsed by Rusty Quill and is distributed under a Creative Commons, attribution, non-commercial sharealike 4.0 international license. For more information about the original source material, visit www.RustyQuill.com/TheMagnusArchives.

The Underwood Collection, Episode 17: Confession Cam

[Theme ends.]

[Tape recorder clicks on. Static is heard throughout.]

CASS

Alrighty, so—Morgan told me to do this? They seemed *kind of* annoyed so I didn't ask why, but I think Ulysses is off working out the infestation in their house again, which has honestly had everyone on edge for the past like… three months?

I mean, okay, if I'm being *really* truthful, things have been tense since Uly got promoted to Head Curator —which isn't because of the promotion! Just the... circumstances. Of the promotion.

It's fine! We're all fine. We're getting more exterminators to work on the termites, so that'll be great! And we can all go out for drinks or dinner or something to celebrate. We haven't done that in a while.

Okay, I should be productive now— hope everyone enjoyed the status update! Not much new in "no one knows what's going on in the Underwood Collection"! We're all doing just fine.

[Sigh]

So I assume I just—Read away at it? Was never much of a drama kid in school, but Uly seems to put in a special effort for these things to get the tone pitch perfect so uh, here we go.

Statement of Darragh Kravitz, regarding an "unaired" - *why is there quotation marks - Ah hem.* Regarding an "unaired" reality show. Statement given July 19th, 2012. Curatorial Assistant Cassian Sedgewick recording.

Statement begins.

Do you watch a lot of reality television? The show never aired, but we promoted it pretty hard, so if you do your research right, a few key words in google should tell you all you need to know about what it was *supposed* to be.

It was called '*The Second Degree*'. Ten people put in a house for ten weeks, all strangers, but with one mutual friend in common. The "Aim" was to see how many different types of people one person could be friends with, and what their common features were. I say "Aim" like that because we all knew that's a load of bull. Execs just want any justification to lock a bunch of mildly attractive twenty-somethings in a
house and wait for the spats to start.

It was a fairly standard format. Once a week someone was voted off by the public, whoever held the least… entertainment value. The usual.

Or, so it seemed.

I was barely even involved in the actual production. Lighting tech was my gig, making sure the C-List celebrity of the hour had *just* the right amount of dewy glow to sate their ego before the cameras began rolling in the confessional booth.

And that's where it all started.

In reality shows, there's often a formula where the fourth wall gets broken, and a cast member is allowed to speak directly to the audience. They sit in a comfy little chair in a cosy little soundproof booth and they spill their guts on however much they want to rake their acrylic nails through their roommates scalp. Confessional, it's called. We had one set up so each member of the 'household', as it were, could give a commentary at the end of each day, and we'd slice the clips throughout the episode to make it look like they were reacting in real time.

The problem is, we didn't exactly get that far.

It was Madeline, first. She was very much the type you'd expect to get applying to one of these shows: blonde, tanned and clothed in her father's money. She was going to be giving a play by play of her first impressions of her new housemates, say what she liked, what she didn't, hopefully get some good gossip footage out that could be manipulated in later episodes.

I finished fixing her spotlight, her mic was clipped on, and the cameras started rolling. We stood round, me, the sound tech, a camera guy and two producers. And then she opened her mouth and said something none of us were even remotely prepared for:

"On 7th of April 1987, Yazmin Jenner tried to hypnotise her neighbour's dog. It didn't work, she only used a cheap toy she got free in a magazine, but she could never quite escape the desire to see those cartoonish swirls replace its eyes.'

We all just sort of…stared at her. Eventually she blinked, then blinked again, before coughing daintily, and politely getting up and wandering off, muttering something about water for her throat. The camera guy didn't wait to be told to cut.

None of us knew who ‘Yazmin Jenner’ was, and she certainly wasn’t someone on the show.

But then we just…set up for the next guy. Sure, it was *weird*, but that’s show biz. Stars are weird sometimes, especially in this kind of programme, and we figured we’d either re-film later or just lean into the whole ‘mad heiress’ vibe for views.

So we bring him in and he’s this big muscley dude, easily 250, and we do the exact same we did for the girl. Lights, camera action, boom.

And for this guy, it takes a little longer. I noticed something I hadn’t in Madeline, but now that I think back I’m sure it was there. The eyes glazed over slightly, like frost crawling up the outside of a window pane.

‘On August 6th 1992, 10 year old Cathy Dodson locked her 5 year-old brother in a cupboard for six hours so she could go out and play and didn’t tell a soul. He’d broken her favourite doll, and she felt some time in that cramped, dust and dark-filled place might serve him some good. He cried for all of it, though she didn’t hear.’

And he does the same thing Madeline did. Coughs a couple of times before giving a grunt and shuffling away. At this point we're all staring at the producers, because it's gotta be some sort of conspiracy among the cast. Freak us out first time filming, just to razz at us. And they're- they're *grinning* at us, in a way that made the hairs on my neck stand stiff. And they go to send the next guy in.

And I'm still a professional, y'know? So I do my job. Get him sat down. And there we go again. Eyes like glassy marbles as he recites this whole- *passage*.

"Rick Crossnan was never super *into* the ideal of 'morals'. Thought they were something other people had to worry about. Not him though. He could do as he pleased, as long as he didn't get caught. And thus began the successful career of a con artist. Little things, at first, the little 'brush past and snag the wallet' or a parcel snatched off an unassuming doorstep. It didn't seem like that much of an escalation to weave himself into the will of an elderly neighbour. *Because he's your* nephew*, don't you remember?* - A quick flick through the yellowed old contacts book on the table - *Stephanie's son.* And so the old man died, and Rick got everything but remorse."

We just let him leave, at that point. And then- Well. That's when the first call came in.

It was one of the producer's personal phones. God knows how they got the number. I couldn't hear anything more than a muffle coming from the transmitting end, and the producer barely made a sound as he clutched it to his ear. What I could hear though? Sounded furious.

The call couldn't have lasted more than a minute before he lowered the phone from his face, colour draining out of it.

Apparently, the raised voice on the other end had been one Rick Crossnan, and he wasn't exactly ecstatic that we'd just broadcast his secrets live on TV.

Thing was though; our episodes were *not* live. And yet, Mr. Crossnan was claiming he'd seen the whole tape. Nothing more than we had, just that succinct clip from when the camera started rolling to when it cut. It had just shown up on his TV, and he had been *begging* down the phone for the footage to be deleted. For some kind of press talk to be called, for our end to say it was all a joke and leave him be, consequence free.

I don't think anyone ever even called the police.

When he hung up, the producer was positively *beaming*. He began whispering frantically with the other one, something about views through the roof, and gestured for the rest of us to continue setting up again.

I hesitated, but the sound tech was already clipping a mic to the next girl so I guess I just..went along with it. Peer pressure or something. Stood back and watched as she shifted in her seat and her eyes - I could have sworn this time they were *glowing*. Emitting a physical light from behind bright green pupils til they beamed almost yellow under my rigging.

I suppose I don't have to tell you what happened next. Her voice was the same as the other two, entirely devoid of emotion. Just rattling it off like a well practised script.

'When he was a child, Jacob Atkins used to play with a magnifying glass. Burned ants. Ladybugs. One memorable occasion, a butterfly's suspended chrysalis, hanging over his grandmothers porch, a heat scored hole bored into the side. But that wasn't *enough,* was it Jacob? It was never even about the *pain* you caused. Just your mother's disappointed face when she saw the scorch marks. So you got older, and bolder, until you'd reared a gang of callous destroyers around you like a weapon primed to go off. They thought no one would miss that stretch of land out behind the old school lot, trees overgrown

and trellis' flowering until they choked each other for space. But when you threw that first dainty match into the summer dried brush, you were the last to wait around, eager to see the deer and foxes flee.'

That was the first one that addressed them directly. The- the *target*, of their little speech. It was like they knew. Knew they were being watched now, that their messages were reaching the people they'd been designed for. That they were getting results and that these people were *scared.* Scared enough that almost as soon as the girl stopped talking, the second producer had her phone clamped to her ear.

I'm not even sure where the girl wandered off too, I was too engrossed in just staring at the producer's face. She had the same frenzied grin as the other had had minutes before, like she was *proud* to receive the call.

The message was pretty much the same story as the last. Paul had seen our show, clip making itself known in the ad break between a quiz show and a *Simpsons* re-run. He wanted it taken down. The producers were more than happy not to comply.

When I managed to tear my eyes away from her ecstatic face, the final housemate for that particular recording session was already in the chair. I

didn’t even bother to touch the lights, just lurked against the back wall, trying to put as much distance between myself, the figure in the chair, and the shark-toothed producers as possible.

I don’t know if it was just the new angle, but this one… they looked genuinely terrifying. The pupils of their eyes were blown wide, and shone a golden amber, like some unnatural imitation of what I’d neglected to give them.

And the other’s faces had remained a cool neutral like their voices. This one had a slight smile, like a gentle, pleased smirk, knowing what they were about to say would create great upset and *revelling in it.* They said,

‘Paul Gosling’s family had always been very proud of him, carrying on the tradition. Taking the old, well polished rifle off the wall, hanging over the mantle like the most precious trophy, and setting off into the woods. To stalk through the leaves, tense posture and silent step, jacket pulled tight against the biting cold of winter or fall. He’d traced that route a hundred times before, both by foot and by map, and he’d never seen a footpath run anywhere close. He was careful. He’d checked. He was *careful*.

But precaution doesnt stop a hasty trigger finger, and the bullet was in the hiker’s neck before he’d even registered the shape was human.

And what were you supposed to do, Paul? Let your family go hungry?'

And that… sweet, serene smile. Blood dribbled past it, through it, slipping between lips that came again to rest in that most benign composure. I don't know if whatever had a hold on them, all of them, ever let go of that last person. God I hope it did. I just turned and left. I wasn't having anything to do with… any of that. We're not the police, we don't handle horror stories like that, not the real ones least.

As I turned to leave, I could hear a phone ringing, and I really didn't want to check if my guess to the caller was up to bet.

Statement ends.

Well that was—weird. I'm not sure what I was expecting, honestly, but it wasn't—*that*. Felt like ten different statements in one. Lets see, Mars already did some follow up notes for me in exchange for bartering half my pizza off me at lunch. Thanks for that, bud.

Sure enough, there was a decent marketing presence online for "*The Second Degree."* Promo headshots of all the participants are up, an airing schedule,

even a Twitter account for the show that was never deleted, but it doesn't have any posts.

And then it just…didn't air. They showed '*Frasier'* reruns in its place. Darragh Kravitz went on to work as a successful lighting operator for several more shows, and is currently still living in Los Angeles, where the statement took place.

All of the, uh, well, 'incidents' were a bit too vague to track down across the whole country. Damn, I'll never get used to how big this place is. Though Mars did manage to find a Paul Gosling that lives on the edge of the 'Middle Aucilla Conservation Area' in Florida, a popular hunting spot. A hiker was reported missing there in 2011, body never recovered. Might just be our guy. But, like Mr. Kravitz so succinctly put it, we're not the police. Whether that man did or did not…kill someone and use them to feed his family…is none of our concern.

End Recording.

[Tape recorder clicks off.]

[Theme plays.]

OUTRO

The Underwood Collection is a podcast produced and distributed by the Pitch Library Creative Team. Find us on Twitter @PitchLibrary, on Tumblr at www.pitchlibrary.tumblr.com, or contact us by sending an email to usherfoundation@gmail.com. The Underwood Theme was written by Theodore Goodwin, and the Underwood logo was created by Maebe. Thank you for listening.